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Air Operation Permit Program

A Study of Permittee Perceptions

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Executive Summary

Purpose

In July 2000, the Bureau Air Management implemented a series of measures designed to improve the air operation permit program. In October 2001, the Bureau of Air Management initiated a statewide program evaluation to determine the effectiveness of those measures. This focus group study was conducted in conjunction with this statewide program evaluation, in order to assess how the program is perceived by the recipients of air operation permits. The results of this focus group study, and a subsequent statewide survey, will be used to guide future program improvements.

The Focus Group Study

This study was conducted by the Wisconsin DNR Bureau of Air Management with assistance from the DNR Bureau of Integrated Science Services. The focus group sessions were conducted one each month, from October 2001 to February 2002, in five different locations across the state, specifically: Rhinelander, Oshkosh, Wisconsin Rapids, Milwaukee, and Madison. In all, thirty-six representatives from industries across the state participated in these focus group sessions.

The Bureau of Integrated Science Services has used the results of this focus group study to develop a survey to determine how the operation permit program is perceived by a broader range of permittees. This survey was distributed to air operation permit holders across the state in May 2002.

The Findings

- In general, air operation permit recipients like their permit writer, but dislike their permit.
- Industry representatives shared positive comments about the following aspects of the operation permit program: site visits, knowledgeable and responsive permit writers, consolidation of all requirements in one document, regulatory relief or flexibility in their permit, use of email to negotiate permit conditions, ease of renewal process, involvement of compliance inspector in permit review, posting of permit documents on web site, ability to select deadlines for reports.
- Industry representatives identified problems with the following aspects of the operation permit program: time lag between application submittal and permit issuance, short time frame for review/comment on draft permit documents before public comment period, burdensome permit requirements with no apparent benefit for the environment, permit process and permit conditions too complicated and too long, failure to incorporate all applicable requirements into one document, construction permit requirements, lack of clarity about state-only versus federally enforceable requirements, complicated application forms, multiple reporting requirements.
- Many industry representatives indicated their permit is fair and consistent compared to those issued to similar industries in Wisconsin. However, several described inconsistencies in certain program areas such as compliance demonstration and record keeping requirements.
- Compared to permits issued to similar industries in other states, industry representatives explained that Wisconsin permits are longer, more complicated, include comprehensive dispersion modeling analysis not conducted in some other states, and include more burdensome compliance demonstration, monitoring, and record keeping requirements.
- Industry representatives provided several additional recommendations for program improvements, including: improve the construction permit/operation permit interface to ensure all requirements are in one document; simplify application forms and permit language; harmonize permits for facilities under same ownership; allow more time for industry review of draft permit documents before public comment period; consolidate permit conditions for similar emission units; highlight changes to permit conditions in draft renewal permit; clarify state-only versus federally enforceable requirements; provide notification to industry of when their compliance certification and monitoring reports are coming due; provide guidance for certifying compliance with Part II permit conditions; use email to negotiate permit conditions; improve organization of information on DNR web site.